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*LIFE STAKED
AT CARDS*

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HENRY MEYER,
THE CONVERTED GAMBLER.

LIFE STAKED AT CARDS

A SKETCH
OF THE LIFE OF HENRY MEYER
A CONVERTED GAMBLER



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BY

HENRY MEYER.

PREFACE.

EARLY education, family training, and circumstances apparently accidental, are potent influences in the formation and molding of character, Yet not infrequently an event of seemingly little consequence may overturn the best-considered plans for a successful career, and alter the entire tenor of a man's life.

To those who may think that the publication of the life of so obscure an individual as myself, and one, too, who for so many years has been a social pariah, can be productive of neither interest nor profit, I would say that the eye of the fly is, in many respects, a more interesting study than that of the eagle, and the *lighthouse* of more service to humanity than the pyramids.

The sketch of my life given to the public in these pages is solely for the glory of God and for the good of my fellow men. It is with deep humiliation that the sorrowful facts of my career are given, But I desire to magnify the grace and mercy of God, by which I was rescued from the perils which were threatening my eternal overthrow.

Trusting that the Lord, who has become my salvation, and whom I now serve, will make this recital a benefit to many, and especially to the young men of our land who may read it, I send it forth, humbly invoking God's blessing upon it.

H. M.

Dedicated

To the Young Men of our Country, with the prayer that it may be instrumental in preserving them from the temptations and dangers which have beset my path, and in leading them to embrace Christ, who is "The Mighty to save," and lead lives of purity and happiness, and in the end have everlasting life.

LIFE

STAKED AT CARDS.



MY EARLY LIFE, EDUCATION, ETC.

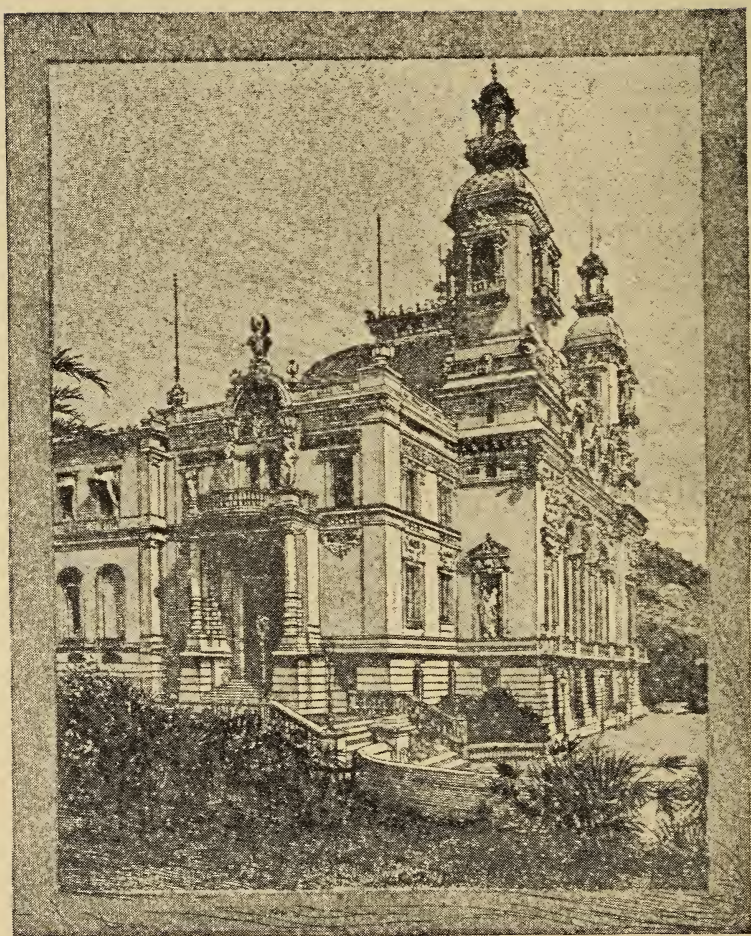
I was born on November 25, 1859, in the City of New York, of German parents. My father was a prosperous business man, of a generous disposition, kind and charitable to his neighbors, and a man whose word was as good as his bond. My mother loved me ardently. She was faithful to all her duties as a wife and mother, and her tender devotion to her children was the controlling impulse of her life. Her generous self-sacrifice, and her almost unlimited capacity to forgive, no one can know so well as her wayward boy, who numbers among his most bitter regrets to-day the recollection of the years of anxiety and grief which he brought upon that precious mother, and of the numberless pangs with which he wrung that mother's heart.

I went to the public school until my thirteenth year, and then was sent to Stuttgart, Germany, to be educated for an architect. I remained in Germany till my seventeenth year. After coming home I disliked the profession for which I had studied, and went on the road as a commercial traveler, in which capacity I served for five years, and, in 1881, I started in the book and stationery business for myself; had a good trade and any number of business friends. From my business I reaped a handsome profit, and up to March 23, 1884, I had not a care upon me, and lived a good, honest Christian life.

MY FIRST GAME OF CARDS—ITS EFFECT.

I received an invitation on March 23 to a swell affair, which I attended to my sorrow. I did not then, however, have any thought of danger, for I thought I was transplanted to another world, a world of real joy. While at the social gathering a number of games were proposed—the first one introduced being *Progressive Euchre*, the winner to receive a prize, and the game was made much more interesting by ladies taking part in it.

From that night's engagement dates my ruin.
I became so infatuated with the cards, and



EXTERIOR OF MONTE CARLO.

with gaming, that the next day, and many days after, I hunted up card tables and gambling resorts, and at last gave up my business for the card table and the gambling-saloon. I left this, my native country, for Europe, on May 29, 1884, and for nine years was one of the most successful gamblers at the tables of chance.

VISITING OTHER GAMBLING RESORTS.

The first gambling resort I visited was Monte Carlo. The famous Casino crowns the slope of Monte Carlo, and contains the gambling rooms, concert hall, and theatre. Nature furnished the beautiful site on which stands the Casino; man's ingenuity added the adornments—both together making one of the most beautiful spots on earth. The interior of this famous gambling den is enchanting; a temple dedicated to fashion, fortune, and flirtation requires a pen more graphic than mine to depict.

To see the look of eager interest on the faces of the participants and the general air of fascination for them, is, while to be regretted, not a matter for much maudlin sympathy on the part of non-participants. Every man who knows enough to earn sufficient money to pay the expense of reaching

this spot, must know that the percentage of chance against him is certain to eventually win all his money.

You will see men running to the tables from the bank—for the Casino contains a regular banking institution—where they have been to have drafts cashed. How earnest they are, and how anxious to get to the table before the ball drops, considering the few minutes as lost during which they had no stake on the table. The only way to visit this place satisfactorily is to decide upon how much you wish to lose—lose it you will—and when lost leave the place. There is no sense in trying to get even; you cannot do it. The Casino company will gladly pay the expenses out of the principality of Monaco to any one who has lost his all at the tables, as it is cheaper than to have another suicide on their hands.

Guards constantly patrol the terraces and grounds watching for intending suicides, and yet there are from 100 to 125 suicides every year. The guard's first duty on finding a body is to put some money in the pockets. If Monaco and Monte Carlo were cleansed of this blot, they would be among the most alluring resorts of the world.

Connected with the Casino is a spacious and richly-adorned theatre, in which an orchestra of about eighty instruments furnishes, each afternoon and evening, as fine music as can be heard in Europe. These entertainments are free, and are always crowded.

After leaving Monte Carlo, I visited every gambling resort of note in the German Empire, such as Ems, Wiesbaden, Baden-Baden, Homburg and many others, extending my tour to other parts of the Continent. I visited France, Spain, Hungary, Austria, and Turkey. In those nine years of my gambling career, I knew not what defeat was, never losing a game, and when I now sometimes think over it, it seems to me that Satan must have been my partner.

MY BROTHER LEAVES HOME.

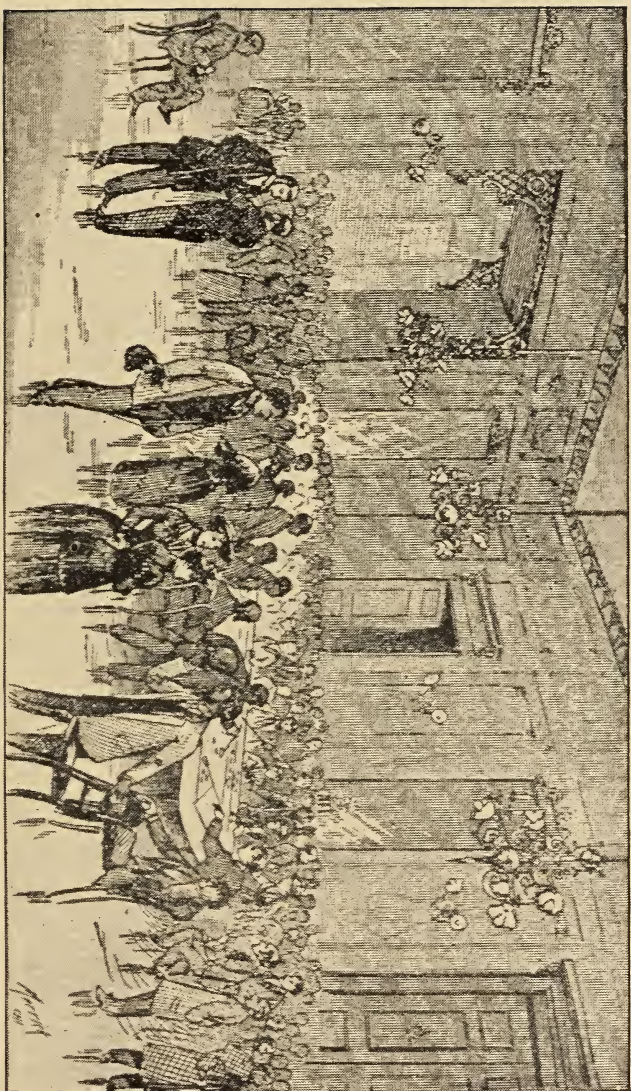
In the year 1885 my brother was fitted out in the same style as myself. That good and kind mother made up another trunk for her other boy, who was to go to Heidelberg to be educated. Imagine a broken-hearted mother who was mourning over her first-born who had gone astray, now fitting out her other boy for a future so full of darkness and sorrow. She put one thing after

another in the trunk, with many a tear for home memories. Last of all, she gave her boy a mother's blessing, with advice, entreating him not to go the downward path, as his brother had done; not to forget to pray, and to go to church regularly, to which promises were made by him, but not kept. But my day of sorrow came, as you already know, if you have read my short story in the *Christian Herald* of June 20, 1894, or in the *New York Recorder* of December 17, 1894.

LIFE STAKED AT CARDS.

I ought, perhaps, here to say, that the gambler in high life should not be compared with the sharp or dive-gambler. You will find among this class those who are well educated and refined, and with big hearts, who will see no man or woman want.

I know of instances in my own gambling life, and of others, where they have restored that which the husband had lost, and more with it. Let me give one case. I well recollect the last day of September, 1889, in the city of Pesth, Hungary, where I played with a *titled gentleman*, who was determined to ruin me at all hazards.



INTERIOR OF THE CASINO, MONTE CARLO.

The Stakes were "My Life against his Wealth." But I came out this time, as always, the winner of that man's entire fortune, estate, and all he had. His wife came to me on the next day, asking me to leave them their *home* and estate. While in conversation with the lady I found out from her that her husband was not in the regular habit of gambling, but he had set his mind on destroying me for the ruin I had caused very many others.

Had I lost, my lot would have been to blow my brains out at the command of the winner. So, after hearing her story, I asked her to take oath never to give her husband any money for gambling purposes, and I would restore to her all that I had won from him. This promise she made and kept, and the lesson has taken all the gambling disposition out of him.

March 22, 1893, I was about leaving Homburg, Europe's notorious gambling resort, when a young man came up to me and introduced himself to me with the frank remark "that I had been pointed out to him the previous day as the *card-fiend* of phenomenal luck, and he had felt a desire to test my power for himself." I accepted the challenge, and an appointment was made for

the next day, under the condition that the game was to continue until one or the other was broke. My luck was the same as that to which I was accustomed. I always won, but I never kept my winnings long. Racing and betting and the lavish generosity to friends soon stripped me of my booty. On that day, the stakes all came my way. My opponent was piqued, and, when all his money was gone, went out and borrowed more; that, too, was lost, and my winnings that afternoon amounted to 60,000 marks (about \$14,000). When his last mark was gone, he rose from the table without a word and went into the garden. I waited to see if he would return. As I still sat at the table, I heard a pistol shot. Instinctively I realized what had happened. I ran into the garden and there, on the turf, lay the young man with whom I had been playing, shot by his own hand. Horror-stricken that the man should have committed suicide, I loosened his clothing, in the hope that it might not be death, but only a swoon from which he might recover. As I threw back the man's coat and vest, some papers fell from an inner pocket, among which was a lady's photograph. I looked at it, and, to my amazement and horror,

recognized it as the portrait of my own mother. Turning to the letters that were with the portrait, I found that they were addressed to my younger brother, whom I had not seen since we were boys together. One searching look at the face, now placid in death, was sufficient. In spite of the marks of years, I knew that the dead face was the face of my brother.

Realizing to the full as I looked at that dead body the awful nature of the business in which I was engaged, I raised my hand toward heaven and vowed that, God helping me, I would never touch a card again as long as I lived. I returned to the room where my winnings still lay, and took from them enough to repay what my brother had borrowed and to pay my own fare back to America, and left the remainder there. It seemed to me to be the price of my brother's blood, and I recoiled from the touch of it.

I sent a telegram to my parents, who were then stopping in Stuttgart, Germany, informing them of my brother's death, and asking them to join me at once. They lost no time in coming. I went to the station to meet them and to explain how all had happened; but they gave me no time to say much. In their agony

and sorrow they repulsed me, saying that I had killed their boy and murdered my brother. On the next day my brother was taken to his last resting place. Those who attended the burial will never forget the scene. Before the second spade of earth was dropped in the grave my mother gave one heart-rending shriek, and was taken away from the open grave of her boy bereft of her reason.

I have only this to say, that God's hand was in the matter, for I saw about two-score and ten do the same that my brother had done. It never had, however, any effect upon me, for, as goes the saying among professional gamblers, "*Death* wipes out the debt and redeems the *honor*."

But in the sight of my parents I still stand as my brother's murderer, and I am also held accountable for my mother being bereft of her reason on the day of my brother's burial, March 24, 1893.

As I look back over my wasted years I often think my parents would have done better to keep their boys at home, instead of sending them among strangers. While at home we had a good Christian training in the Lutheran faith. We attended Sabbath-school and church regularly.

After my brother had been gone three years my parents left for Europe. I often stopped in the same hotel that they did, but never had a chance to speak to them, as I was entirely discarded by them. Their reason for going to Europe was to watch over their other boy; but all their watching did not seem to do him any good, for he went the same way that I had gone.

So we made wanderers out of our parents, who tried to forget their troubles and sorrow by constant change of scene.

COMING HOME TO AMERICA.

Without a loving word from father and mother, I left Europe the day after my brother's burial and came back to America. I commenced to look for work, but did not succeed in finding any for some time. My friends would have nothing to do with me. They could have given me work or have procured some for me; but they spurned the gambler.

Kind reader, let me tell you that, during the last winter months, I suffered the utmost agony from want that man could suffer. A man who had not known what want was from

his cradle up, and then being thrown into such a position, trying to do right, and being spurned from everybody's door, was hard indeed. The only position I could find was to go on the road and sell whiskey, for which I was offered a handsome salary, or go back to gambling and run a gambling house for others. These offers I refused. This went on for eight long months. I had to sell everything I had except the clothes on my back, and when the proceeds were spent I thought the best thing I could do was to blow my brains out, as my brother had done, for nobody wanted me and work I could not find.

MY HAPPY CONVERSION.

In the providence of God I was led one morning to the *Florence Mission*. On November 23, 1893, I asked Mrs. Wall if she knew of anyone to whom I could apply for work. She asked me about my condition and I told her part of my story. She asked me to kneel down with her in prayer, which I did, and when we arose she invited me to come to the mission that evening, which invitation I accepted. As I sat there and listened to the different testimonies, I thought my case was

hopeless, and that there was no redemption for me. Just then a very old verse came to my mind:

“In peace let me resign my breath
And Thy salvation see ;
My sins deserve eternal death,
But Jesus died for me.”

When the invitation was given I arose and went forward, and found peace with God at the foot of the cross. It seemed then that my trials began anew, but by constant prayer Jesus helped me to bear them. For thirteen nights I walked the streets of New York without having a place to lay my head. At last, through a kind friend in the Florence Mission, I obtained a few weeks' work, sweeping the streets at one dollar a day. You cannot imagine my happiness over the first dollar I received, and I can truly say it was honestly earned.

I am happy to say that God has wonderfully kept me from the day of my conversion till now. I sometimes find a little work here and there, and I know and trust that God will yet place me in the right position.

In the latter part of December, 1893, I connected myself, as a probationer, with the

Allen Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, of which Rev. W. Hamilton was pastor. After a time I took my certificate to the Seventh Street Church, of which Rev. James V. Saunders, D.D., is pastor, and about two months ago I was received into full membership. I am very happy in my Church relations, and hope to continue faithful, and to be led out in paths of usefulness.

TEMPTATIONS AND TRIALS.

Last May I had almost gone back to my old life, not as a player, but to take charge of a gambling room. God, however, was surely watching over me. If I had had any kind of work, nothing on this wide earth could have tempted me, but I could get nothing to do.

Had it not been for Miss M. E. Upham, whom I met on that day, I should have most likely returned to my evil course. I was drawn to a meeting held in Calvary Baptist Church, by the Salvation Army. I knelt down beside Sister Upham, and there made a complete surrender to God. A few days after that I had a few weeks' work at the Broome Street Tabernacle, doing some writ-

ing for Rev. C. H. Tindall. After that, Mr. O'Connor, of Christ Mission, gave me some writing to do, and I shall never forget Mr. O'Connor's kindness, for, on the evening I left him, he said that there was always a place at his table for me. So God has on all sides raised up friends for me. Here is an incident I wish to mention. I went into a gentleman's office, one day last June, asking him to buy one of Mr. Quinn's books, "Fools of Fortune," but instead of buying a book he thought he would give me some good advice.

After I had told him my story, and what temptations I had had, he finally said: "I do not think it wrong for you to take the offer made you in the gambling house. If you cannot get anything else to do take it, for nobody else seems willing to give you work, and you cannot starve. They do not want the book, and by the time you have made enough money you can give it up again, and no one will be the wiser."

Praise God that I did not take his advice! The Lord has kept me through all my troubles and trials, and is still keeping me, and I can go about telling how good He is to me. From the day I was converted in the Florence Mission I have not missed one evening in going

to some mission or church and telling what my Saviour has done for me. Quite frequently Brother William Nesbitt, the preaching policeman, asks me to go with him to the meeting which he conducts.

Ostracized from all friends, God has raised a host of others for me, and among them is Mr. John Hebron, Evangelist, who has taught me much of God's Word.

PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS ON GAMBLING.

Gambling is a kind of action by which pleasure is obtained at the cost of pain to another. It affords no equivalent to the general good. The happiness of the winner implies the misery of the loser. The thinker and the worker add to the general fund of happiness and wealth. Food for the mind and for the body are both necessities. Art, music, literature, contribute much to the people's wealth. The merchant is as useful as the manufacturer or the farmer; he who relates supply to need, as he who furnishes supply. But the gambler neither makes nor ministers to the public good. He creates nothing ; relates nothing ; he is a parasite on the body-politic, a bacillus

in the blood of the people, bringing fever and threatening death.

Gambling is widespread; at sociables, in the home and in business. Children, women and men are possessed with the spirit of gambling. The children match pennies and throw dice. In social life, the pack of cards is more used than the prayer-book or the Bible; and in business speculations it runs high. The grab-bag in the Church, progressive euchre in the home, and margins in trade, keep men and women in a fever of excitement. The generality of people throughout the world are of the opinion that gamblers are the worst people on the face of the earth. They are wrong, for I tell you there is ten times more rascality among men outside of the class they call gamblers, than there is inside of it. Persons that the generality of people class as gamblers, are only those who play at games of chance with cards.

What are the members of the Board of Trade but gamblers? The Board of Trade is just as much a gambling house as a faro bank. Do not the members put up their (and oftentimes other people's) money, on puts, calls, margins, and futures? Do not some poor people have to wait a long time in

the "future" before they get back the money some rascal has put up and lost? Talk about the morality of gamblers! They are not swindlers, and I never heard of one who ever served a term in the penitentiary, or was arrested for embezzling money.

There is, in every large community, a class of professional gamblers—men who fatten on the follies of their fellows; men who, in defiance of law, by all sorts of lying devices, rob the unwary and trap the innocent. The gamblers are a class by themselves—social outcasts, financial pirates—and, with a political pull, they manage those who govern.

Appealing to the love of chance, they bewitch the foolish—with an abundance of money, they defy justice. Outlawed by legislation, ostracized by social leaders, branded by the Church, the gamblers drain the life-blood, ruin the honor and damn the souls of their innumerable victims. Lastly, the gambler is a *thief*; not that he steals, but he plays for and wins that which does not belong to him. And he is a murderer, too, as he drives those to suicide who lose their all. Gambling makes more widows and orphans than any other vice, unless it be strong drink.

GAMES AT HOME.

Cards are played in very many homes for pastime, but little dreaming that they are sowing the seed of destruction. Imagine a mother sitting down with her boy and girl to a so-called social game of progressive euchre, which is nothing but gambling *straight-out*; and the house that has gambling in it has no piety. Let that boy become a gambler, or the girl go astray, the mother will be the first one that will close her door to him or her; and yet she was the one that sowed the seed, and this is the harvest she gathers. Mothers, take warning—beware! Come, fellow gambler, turn you toward God! He comes more than half-way, and what He has done for me He will do for you the moment you accept Jesus; and in His name ask for help. Not only help to overcome our vices is given, but free salvation and eternal life are the priceless gifts through the blood of Jesus, free to all, however low they may have fallen. Think well what your position is at this moment. Satan is fast carrying you on to hell to share his everlasting torments; but the strong arm of Jesus is stretched out to you. Lay hold on it at once with all your might, for to-morrow

it may be out of your reach, and you will be lost forever.

PERILS OF YOUNG MEN.

To rescue young men from the evils of gambling is the work to which I now, by God's help, devote my life. Night after night I have lingered about the doors of the uptown clubs and saloons in New York City in which gambling is carried on, to give a word of warning to those exposed to these evils. Many young men who have been thus approached, whose confidence I have won by giving them good advice, before the night had grown very old, have listened to the story of my gambling life, and under its influence have given me a promise never to touch cards again.

It is with the hope that those who have not already entered upon this course may be deterred from entering upon it, and that those who may have already tasted the fleeting pleasures of this unhealthy excitement may be induced to pause before it is too late, that the writer has made this, his frank confession of his own follies, and his gratitude to God for deliverance.

I have heard men in all stations of life say they had never been led into temptation. If

they have not felt temptation, it is because they have not tried to do right. A man chained and hobbled, as long as he lies quietly does not test the power of that which holds him down; but when he rises up and resolves to snap the chain and break the hobble, then he finds the power of the iron. And there are men and women who have been for many years bound hand and foot by evil habits, who have never felt the power of the chain because they have never tried to break it.

It is very easy to go on down with the stream, but just turn around and try to go against the wind and tide, and you will find it a different matter. As long as we go down the current of our evil habit we seem to get along quite smoothly; but if we turn around and head the other way, toward Christ and pardon and heaven, then how we have to lay to the oars!

Temptation you will have of one kind or another. Not one person escapes. Satan needs not to tempt his own, for he has them in his grasp; but it is God's children who have these temptations, and the great enemy has a grappling hook just fitted for them.

Ask the aged Christian whether he is never assaulted by the powers of darkness. If you

think you have conquered the power of temptation you are very much mistaken.

But by constant prayer we will be enabled to overcome temptation, for God knows our weakness, as well as the strength of the enemy. He will not permit one of His children to fall if they trust in His love, and we can all have that victory by being dead unto the world and alive unto God.



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